

In The Arms Of The Angel



An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

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Abstract

Too often we are caught up in our own expectations and self-imagery. The wake-up call that we all need but never want comes at a time when we are upon the brink rebirth. There is no way to predict what the worst and best times of our lives will be. Even as we live them, those times may not be labeled as such until we have lived on further. A testament of life, of happiness, and of sorrow can be culminated in a testament of love.

This story is based on the events of my life during the autumn months of 1998 here at Ball State University.

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Ch.1: The Long Ride

"It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end."

-Ursula K. LeGuin

Hot summer—that's how it was in Central Indiana, 1998. But the focus of my mind was on the upcoming school year. This was to be my second year as a Resident Assistant for Ball State University Department of Housing and Residence Life. Hall monitor, depending on how you look at it. But for those of us who possessed some dignity, being an RA meant a little more. And more often than not, it took at least another year to receive the thanks and appreciation from those whom you watched over and lived with. Riding in my car on that sunny afternoon, radio blaring, and passing the cars, I was thinking about what may lay ahead for me in the coming year. I finally caught up to the silver and orange U-Haul which was trailed by the royal blue Geo Prism. In the Prism was my girlfriend, and in every sense of the word, she was my *girlfriend*. With her flowing brown hair, and fair skin, she almost looked devilish in those sleek sunglasses. Gretchen Ann Smith was her name, but most called her Gret. We had been dating steadily for the past year and two months. Our relationship, like most, had its ups and downs. My feelings for her were of love and happiness. But how deep was the love I had for her? Many times she challenged me on this. I remembered one particular night a few months before...

"Tim, where are we going?" she said as the fuzzy lights of Hummel Park trickled through the car window.

"Gret, I just love you, that's all there is to it. I don't know where we're going, or what the future holds; all I know is that I love you here, right now. Why can't you see that?" I was sure of my stance on our relationship at that point, but I refused to look into the future and dare think of the wondrous possibility that Gret was the one for me.

— “Tim, are your parents holding you back? I know how you are afraid of what they think and how they want you to be ‘set up’ somewhere before you get married.”

“No, that’s not it, they have nothing to do with how I feel.”

“I know you love me...I love you, too. But there has to be a reason behind it, why do you love me? Why are you with me?”

“What kind of question is that, Gret? I love you...I love you because you’re you...you’re smart, funny, I love being with you, what else can I give you right now?” My tone had risen and we were almost yelling at each other.

— “When I was with Jeremy, we fought like this all the time. He kept saying he loved me and that he wanted to be with me forever, but it took me four years to realize that he was never going to propose to me. Now what can I expect from you? You have to want me for a reason. Tell me, can you see us together in the future?”

“Of course I can. I can see myself with someone just like you. Don’t you see? You have all of the qualities that I am looking for in a wife. I just think that we need time to solidify our feelings for one another. Then we will know for sure.”

“I know, I know, Tim. I don’t want to scare you off by me being too clingy. I just wish you would see it my way...I...I guess I’m just gonna have to accept that we see things differently when it comes to our future.” Tears started to swell in her eyes.

“Okay...it’s all right, Gret. I think it’s important that we both acknowledge that. We just see things differently.”

“I know.”

— This was about the third such serious conversation we had had that summer. We had both been working for a couple of weeks, and that particular night was one of the few nights we actually had together.

But here she was now, driving in her car. She gave me a half-smile as she teasingly waved at me. I slowly passed her in the shiny Prism. Our relationship had been built on a series of trusts and mistrusts. Opening our hearts to each other was like trying to knock down a brick wall with marshmallows. I was always too afraid to show any signs of emotion, while she was afraid to show too much emotion and give the impression of clinginess and insecurity. There was one night towards the end of the summer when we went out for a romantic dinner. It was the last date we would have before we had to go back to school.

“Could you roll down your window?” I asked.

— “Huh?”

“Roll down your window hon, it’s too hot in here.”

“Oh, okay.” Gret seemed to be drifting off in her own mind.

“Anyway, I was...” Suddenly her cell-phone rang.

“Oh, hold on...Hello? Oh, hi!” she said as she looked over at me with an evil grin. She knew how to get at me, just as I knew how to get at her. I thought it was this guy she had been working with who just happened to be trying out with my favorite team, the Indianapolis Colts. His name was Steve Rosga. He, Gret, and another of Gret’s friends had been out before. Whether I wanted to admit it or not I was jealous for the first time in our relationship. I had a hard time realizing that it was jealousy, and, for that matter, expressing it. “So anyway ... yeah ... he took me out. We went to this really nice restaurant on the north side. It’s called Bravo’s.”

— “Who is it?” I whined.

“Uh-uh...yeah...that would be great...I’ll see you then,” she said, nearly laughing.

Damn! Why was she doing this to me? Yeah, it could be her best friend, Donna, but it probably was Steve.

“Gret, who was that? And stop laughing!”

“Tim, I can’t believe you! Look at you! You’re getting all worked up!”

“I just can’t believe you’re toying with me!” I was starting to get really annoyed.

“Tim, it was Donna, who did you think it was...Steve?” she retorted, also getting annoyed.

“Look...I’ve just been thinking lately...we’re both getting ready to go to school soon. For you, this will be going back to a big-time university, on campus! You’re gonna meet a lot of new guys, just like this Steve guy...”

“Look, Steve is just a good friend...we went out in a group the other night and had a good time. Any why are you so worried that I am going to meet someone. Honestly, no one is going to hit on me. Who are you kidding?”

She always discredited herself, her personality, and her astonishingly good looks. I was starting to fear the worst. They say that those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Well, the way I saw it, this situation was starting to shape up the same way it had for me a couple years earlier when I was studying in England. My girlfriend at the time was about to go off to college. She was pretty, she was outgoing, she promised nothing was going to happen. But something did happen. She found another.

“Hon...it’s just that.... I don’t want...” But it was too late; tears reluctantly fell from my eyes. For the first time in the year and three months we had been together, I was starting to cry. Gret couldn’t believe it. Her jaw dropped. I was at my weakest.

— “Tim, it’s okay. You know, there isn’t really a good reason for someone to leave if they are already happy where they are.” I remembered that. I remembered that so well, it pierced me like a needle.

That memory was haunting me I slowly passed Gret, and then her parents, and eased out in front. Our caravan headed north on highway 69. We were almost there.

Ch. 2: Welcome Back

"When people go to work, they shouldn't have to leave their hearts at home."

-Betty Bender

FRANKTON AND MUNCIE NEXT EXIT

This sign had become all too familiar in the previous three years of my many journeys to Ball State. Our own little caravan was getting ever closer to the future. I was in front, Gret's parents in the silver and orange U-Haul were next, followed by Gret in her car. Our first stop was the ever-faithful Lafollette Complex. Host to a wide variety of students and faculty, Lafollette was a mainstay at the old university. Gret was to be a non-traditional RA for a non-traditional dorm residence hall. Shively Hall, located in Lafollette, hosted the 21-years-and-up gang. This included foreign exchange students, transfers, graduates, and even the rare 21-year-old freshman. But right now, the plan was to move Gret's stuff into Shively, and then move my stuff into my dorm. We all made our way to the main elevator at Shively Hall.

"My stupid card won't work, I don't believe this," Gret scowled, angrily swiping it in the sensor.

"Hon, just call Sher and get her to..."

"I did, Tim! She said she...wait a minute...oh, stupid! This is my IUPUI card!"

Gret's parents laughed. It was much needed and welcomed amidst all the hustle and bustle of moving in. Gret hastily searched through her coin purse to find her Ball State identification card.

"There it is...here!" she said in excitement.

And with the swipe of the correct card, the doors magically opened.

"Hon, just relax you're getting too stressed." I tried to calm her down a little.

"I'll be fine."

— She got so stressed so easily. Change was not so easy for her as for most people. Her parents and I helped bring her things to her room. Nearly three cartloads of clothes and such, but it didn't take too long.

Gret was very excited. It was her first time back on campus in nearly two years. Her last stint was at Indiana University. But this was different. Here she was, her first year at Ball State, and she was an RA. She was the first non-student to be hired because she was not officially enrolled during her interviews. Also, she was the first pick in the RA "draft." But that was only one of the many things I loved about Gret. She was goal-oriented, focused, and impressed those who interviewed her. She was not too different from myself in that respect. I loved her. It was hard, it was different at times, but I loved her. The fear of losing her to the excitement and newness of the campus frightened me.

— During the whole time in Lafollette my eyes would wander. I would look around, up and down, noticing the scenery that I had noticed many times before. I was looking around. I was looking around for something that was yet to be found. And all the while this empty, hollow feeling inside my gut was slowly getting bigger. The sturdy walls of the Lafollette Complex reached higher and higher till they touched the ceiling, as did my wandering. Something or somebody knew what was in store for me.

This was all new to us, and we weren't quite sure how to handle it. For the first time in our relationship, we would be just a couple blocks from each other. Theoretically, we would see each other whenever we wanted. It was new, exciting, yet secretly I couldn't help but feel scared deep down inside. I was supposed to show her around. I was supposed to be a guide to how things worked at this school. But Gret wouldn't hear of it. She had already made her mark by

—

— becoming an RA before she was officially enrolled. Now she wanted to experience everything on her own. Who was I to stop her?

The next stop was my dorm, Whitcraft Hall. Three East Whitcraft Hall of the Mark E. Studebaker West Complex to be correct. We all called it “StuWest,” since the entire complex was now labeled as one hall instead of four separate halls. Gret, her parents and I crammed into the service elevator and made our ascent with two carts full of my belongings, the first of many trips. As the old elevator door creaked open, there it was. Painted on the wall outside of the bathroom was our claim-to-fame. It was what bonded the men on the floor two years before into an epic family and it was what carried on last year to give me a base from which to work. A tradition that would last forever was centered on this one figure. But the funny thing was, no one fully understood the meaning unless they were actually part of this, the third floor community.

— The list that he proudly held had everyone’s name on it: past, present, and future. If you were on that list, you were one of us, you were welcomed, and most importantly, you were accepted for who you were. The latex coat, which constituted this brave figure, was as shiny as the day we painted him. He was our mascot, our savior. He was Gweedo, the Penguin.

“Oh brother!” Gret rolled her eyes.

“You see? This is it everyone, welcome to Three East Whitcraft. Home of the Penguins!” I quickly pointed out Gret’s name on the wall. She of course was an honorary Penguin.

“Wow, ain’t that something?” Gret’s dad, Gary, was always quick to compliment or encourage.

— “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let’s get your stuff.” Gret liked to jab at me whenever she could.

“I think it’s kind of cool.” Debbie Smith, Gret’s mom, was one who always stuck up for me when her daughter poked fun. She was a very loving person and always thought with her heart.

It took a while, but we finally got everything into my room. There was so much that we had to put some of it in the hallway and the adjacent study lounge. It was a long and tiring process. We must have made about ten trips up the elevator moving my belongings in.

It was late in the evening, so after a quick dinner at a nearby sandwich shop, we said our good-byes to Gret’s parents. I thought for a moment how someday they just might be my in-laws. With a hug from Deb and a firm handshake from Gary, they both were off in the silver and orange truck. Before I left to go back to my room, Gret gave me a big hug and said in her sad, puppy-dog voice, “I’ll miss you.”

“I know, babe. Don’t worry, I’m just down the road.”

“I know, but I’ll still miss you.”

“We probably should spend our first night separate, so we can get our rooms straightened. We probably shouldn’t get too used to staying the night at each other’s place because we may not get to all the time.”

“I know, you’re right. I love you.”

“I love you too, hon. See you tomorrow.”

RA training would start late the next day. I had a lot to do, but I was so tired. I headed back to my room in Whitcraft Hall. But at about 11 p.m. that night I heard someone yelling outside my window.

“Hey butthead! Hey! Hose-head, you up there?!”

“Hawse, what the hell are you doing?” I yelled back.

“Pickin’ my nose... what’s it look like I’m doin’? Come down here and get me before I have to beat ya!”

“All right, hold on!” Good old Hawse. He was my friend, my companion, and my confidant, who was nothing like me. His full name was Jacob Yushenko and he epitomized what the Penguins were all about. He lived next door to me last year and took charge of the floor when I wasn’t able to. You might say his personality was a mixture of Cory Farley, John Belushi, John Candy, and Archie Bunker. All of these characters culminated in a 5’9”, 260-pound barrel of laughs. Despite all of that, he had outstanding leadership qualities. If you didn’t know where you were going, he was going to lead the way. He was on campus early because of football, not because he played, mind you, but because he was an effervescent manager. I went down to meet him at the Whitcraft entrance and walked him up to my room on the third floor.

“Dude! Football’s tough. They got me runnin’ and hittin’ with the scout team.”

“Really...that’s cool. How the hell have you been, man?”

“Not too bad. Man, I got some stories for you!” Hawse went on to tell about his misadventures during the past summer. His demeanor was anything but shy or timid. He was right in your face, making sure he got his point across. Everything he ever had to say in his life he said with as much enthusiasm as possible. Ergo, you listened to everything Hawse had to say whether you wanted to or not. “No, for real, there must have been twenty cops at the party I was at!” He kept going on and on. I listened to what he had to say, but deep in the corners of my mind, I was thinking about Gret. I was wondering what she was doing and how she was adjusting to her new environment. But Hawse had a keen perception of people he talked to and almost instantly he asked me, “So-ah, how are you and Gret doing?” I had told him about our

troubles this summer in a couple of letters. He knew what was going on. I didn't want to say much right now, but just enough to let him know how things were.

"That's cool. Hey, later on we got to talk about the Penguins. We got to get this floor off its feet this year, you know?"

"Yeah, you're right, Hawse. I just hope I don't get a bunch of pricks like last year."

"But you see, this is where you got to step up and take control. It's these first few days of move-in that are important. You got to step up and be a leader because that's exactly what they need."

"I know, you're right."

"I know I'm right, dude. I've been around guys like this for over two years now."

Hawse *was* right. Last year, I backed off way more than I should have. I had to make something happen. But it seemed like a lot of work at this point. I wondered if I was up to the challenge.

Chapter 3: The Beginning of the End

"Love is the flower of life, and blossoms unexpectedly and without law, and must be plucked where it is found, and enjoyed for the brief hour of its duration."

-D. H. Lawrence

I think I got up around 11 o'clock the next morning. I was not going to get everything unpacked and put away in time. That frustrated me. I also had to meet my staff again. We had a brief meeting at the end of last year. So I knew faces but not names. We were the largest staff in the history of Ball State Housing. Of the seventeen, twelve were RA's, 3 were hall directors, and two were MA's, or Multicultural Advisors. That was fairly big considering the average staff size consisted of six to eight RA's and two hall directors. I already had one year working with an RA staff but this was definitely different. Three of us were returning from the lower half of StuWest, Painter/Whitcraft, while only two returned from the upper half of the StuWest, Palmer/Davidson. The rest of the staff was either rookies or transfers from other halls.

I went about my day trying to avoid my new staff if at all possible. Some of them wandered down to my room for quick greetings. I wanted to get my possessions in order so I could breathe. I felt like the entire year was not going to go well unless I was set up. And that started in my room, where I would live and work out of for nearly an entire year.

The next day we had a few meetings to go to at the student center. We had to caravan a few cars in order for all of us to get there. I rode with two new staff members, Jerome LeClure and Elizabeth Gibbs.

"So, uh, what's your story, Tim," Jerome asked, in a very serious tone.

"Uh, what do you mean?"

"Where are you from, what's your life like?"

Okay, I really didn't expect such a straight and forthright question, but I figured it deserved a straight and forthright answer.

— “I’m from Plainfield, graduated 1995, math education major, coaching minor. I love sports, particularly football and basketball. I have a girlfriend named Gret who’s an RA this year in Shively.”

“That ‘s cool. Do you like life in Plainfield?”

“Yeah, it’s all right. You been there?”

“I’ve been through there once or twice. A buddy that lived on my floor last year was from Mooresville.”

“Yeah, that’s just south of my home.”

Jerome’s tone was monotonous. It wavered just a little for emphasis. He seemed very honest and sincere. He didn’t seem like the type who would care for the selfish or arrogant.

— Elizabeth Gibbs, on the other hand, was very animated. I liked riding in her car. It reminded me of mine: old, lots of miles, rough around the edges. I could tell she was similar to me. She didn’t have much money, she had humble beginnings, and her sincerity, like Jerome’s, was eminent. Elizabeth spoke what was on her mind regardless of who was in the car.

“This car’s a piece of shit!”

“Gibbs, it’s okay. This car will take you where you want to go,” said Jerome.

“Yeah, barely. A dildo has more power. Don’t you think a dildo would have more power than this, Tim?”

“I don’t think I would know.”

— Jerome slowly turned his head and gave me a look that I would see many times over. It was almost a serious look that I thought was stern, but then he broke out into this crazy, bellowing expression with his mouth wide-open and smiling. It was a look that almost said, “Get a load of this Gibbs-girl!” Jerome and Gibbs knew each other from before. They both attended

Concord high school in Elkhart County. They were about three years apart. I immediately felt comfortable around both of them. I knew that I would get to know these two before anyone else on staff. It helped that Elizabeth was my sister floor, Three West, Whitcraft. Jerome was above both of us on the fourth floor of Painter Hall. We were the three RA's of the "ghetto" of StuWest. All of the other floors above us had been renovated.

The meeting at the Student Center was boring, as most RA meetings go. Our staff was rather cumbersome at times due to the fact we took up nearly three times the space as other staffs. I guess it was our trademark. Other staffs would turn around and look at all the commotion we were making. It was kind of funny. We were all seated in the back. I peered up to look around at all the bright, shiny, and overly excited RA's from around campus. And there she was, my one and only. Gretchen was sitting in the third row on the end. She was excited.

With a big grin and a slight gleam in her eye, she turned around and saw me. After a quick wave she turned back around to continue talking with her fellow staff members. Wow. My girlfriend was an RA, just like me. We were actually going to be working together again, just like we did two summers ago when we were camp counselors at Hummel Park. I could tell she was excited, almost giddy. I felt excited for her, but at the same time, almost envious. I worried that deep down her excitement over being here was slowly overtaking her attention and feelings towards me. I could feel it.

The meeting dragged on, as did the next several days of training. As I periodically ran into Gret between meetings, I started to sense more of a disconnection. The funny thing is, I did nothing to counter the apparent disconnection. I figured that Gret needed to get settled into her new surroundings, as I needed to prepare for this coming year. So as she focused on her immediate tasks, I did too. Our phone conversations in the evening lacked depth and were

unnecessarily short. I visited her only a couple of nights during the whole week. As I denied our coming apart, I kept concentrating on the things I had to do in order to prepare for the incoming Penguins. Some evenings I would turn down offers from Jerome to play basketball with him and the other guys from staff. I told him that I needed to work on my floor. Half annoyed, Jerome would always attempt to sway me otherwise, but to no avail.

A couple of days before move-in day, my friend Katrina Schmitt came back up to school. She was living off-campus this year. Our friendship had quite a history. We met on the internet. She claims that I was stalking her. In all actuality, she was just a random name on a chat list who I decided to write. It ended that we lived in the same hall and started hanging out. Our relationship was based on trust, talk, and goofing around. She got to know Gret last year when Gret would come up to visit on the weekends.

Katrina and Gret came by one night to see if I wanted to go to the bars with them.

“Timmy!” Katrina always greeted me with the same “Timmy.”

“Hi Katrina! How have you been?” I said as we quickly embraced.

“Oh, just fine. What are you doing?” Katrina had a fairly thick “region” accent. Her hometown of Highland, Indiana was about twenty minutes outside of Chicago.

“Just getting my stuff put away and getting the floor ready. You know, the usual. Hey sweetie.” I gave Gret a quick hug as well. There was a slight hesitation, but we continued to act as if nothing was wrong.

“Timmy, you have to go out with us tonight!” Katrina was unyielding as she spoke in her trademark and wavering valley-girl voice.

“Sorry guys, I can’t. I just have too much to do.”

“Come on, you need a break. Don’t be like you were last year.” Again, Katrina was unyielding.

I looked at Gret. She seemed to just stare at the floor or at Katrina the whole time. She knew me and knew how I was about putting business before pleasure. She knew I wasn’t going to go out with them and it disappointed her.

“I’m sorry. I just have to stay here and get ready for Friday. It’s move-in day for the freshmen, you know.”

“Fine, whatever, you big party-poopers.”

“I know, I know. You guys have fun with out me.” I felt bad. Gret looked down as she said a quick good-bye. Back I went to the grindstone.

Two days later was move-in day for the freshmen class of 1998. This day was always exciting. Everyone is up and moving about. Lots of carts and moving boxes went up and down the hallways. There were also a lot of mixed feelings in the air. The guys were excited for finally being on campus and starting the new school year. But there was a feeling of worry and fear due in part to moving away from home for the first time and not knowing what to expect. As a requirement of the Housing Department, I sent out a letter to the guys explaining what they were getting into by moving onto the Penguin floor. It went something like this:

Dear Studebaker West resident:

Allow myself to introduce.... myself (Austin Powers blurb). My name is Tim Kasper and I am going to be your Resident Assistant for the 1998-99 school year. What is a Resident Assistant? Well, my job is to basically help you get acquainted with living in the residence halls here at Ball State. This is my senior year and it will be my second year as an “RA.”

This year promises to be exciting. Some of you are returning, some are transferring from different halls, but most of you are freshmen. Don’t worry; I’ve been there before. I can

truly understand any excitement, worries, or fears you might have. You are moving into the Studebaker West Complex. It contains the halls Palmer/Davidson (floors 6-9) and Painter/Whitcraft (floors 3-5). We are combining all the halls into one complex this year due to renovation. We will be the largest collective residence halls on campus this year.

You will be moving onto the 3-East Whitcraft Hall, home of the Penguins. Now, you might be thinking that the Penguin is a cheesy mascot. But let me tell you that each of you will be carrying on a time-honored tradition that began two years ago. The Penguins are a source of identity and belonging. What started out as a name for an intramural softball team had flourished into a symbol of pride. Over the last two years, the Penguins have been the leaders of Painter/Whitcraft Halls, providing support for hall-wide programs, sponsoring their own events, attending football and basketball games and, of course, providing the well-known Penguin T-Shirts. We are even looking to have a campus-wide Toga Party this fall. You may think of the Penguins as sort of a residence hall fraternity, minus the dues.

I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have about Ball State, the residence halls, or the Penguins. The Penguins can mean as much or as little to you would like it to. I look forward to this year and all of the possibilities it may bring.

Go Penguins!

Yours truly,

Tim Kasper

E-mail: timkasper@hotmail.com

I was as prepared as I could possibly be. I had room inventories, info cards, and another welcome letter with specifics on move-in. I was proud of myself. Even my room was finally in order. The floor was up and running again.

The new generation of Penguins began showing up. It was hard to keep up with all of the new faces. Each guy was led to my room and introduced to me. I gave them their forms and letters and explained a few technicalities of moving in. The one thing I emphasized was how everyone would be bombarded with information over the next few days, so they needed to bear with us. It was hard to keep up with all of the names and faces. I came across many first names: Mark, Bill, Clint, Andy, Shawn, Ken, Tom, and last names like Obie, Vault, Taylor, Muha,

Kolesar, Sullivan, and Garmon. After most of the new guys were somewhat settled in, we held a brief meeting late in the afternoon. It was nothing very important, long enough to run through some formalities and remind everyone of the opening events around campus and in Studebaker West.

It wasn't until later in the evening that the handful of returnees moved in. Cory Bassett and "Jimbo" Rizzary were going to be roommates. Cory was a respectable guy who was well liked. You couldn't help but laugh at him as his witty and quiet sense of humor would keep you guessing. "Jimbo" was an honorary Penguin who was moving down from the sixth floor. Jimbo was aspiring to be president of the floor this year--the topmost position in the Penguin council hierarchy. He was generally outspoken, yet dependable. I liked Jimbo, but at times he could be too much. I was going to use his strengths to help build the community to the floor and add a sense of leadership.

Then there was Nottingham, Jared Nottingham. He always reminded me of the character George Castanza from *Seinfeld*. He wheezed when he spoke and had this incredibly annoying laugh that sounded like a chipmunk in a blender. Nottingham was a mainstay on the Penguin floor. He had a child-like innocence in his demeanor. This made him approachable and anything but intimidating. Most often, one would end up joking about Nottingham behind his back. We loved him just the same. And lastly, there was Jerry Hoener and Mike Dexter. These two guys were rather quiet on the floor last year and occasionally offered their help. But no matter who we were, we were all Penguins. I was proud of that. All the while Hawse's words kept ringing in my ear, "This is where you got to step up and take control, these first few days of move-in. You got to step up and be a leader." He was right.

The next day was Saturday, August 22, 1998. It was the day of the annual Cardinal Games held on Lafollette Field outside of Gret's dorm. Ball State's Recreation Programs sponsored this event of silly games in a carnival-like atmosphere. I must have had about twenty Penguins with me. This was the first big event that we all could do as a floor. I was excited. The sun was brightly shining down on all of us, as if it were blessing us and giving us a good start to the year. There were all kinds of games to participate in, from the egg-toss to the water-barrel fill. In passing in between games I finally spotted girlfriend. Gret had shown up with a lot of residents from Shively Hall. I remember her saying how she wanted to diminish the reputation that Shively had of not being involved. She was getting off to a good start. She looked so beautiful that day with her sunglasses hiding her eyes and her brown hair flowing in the wind. We passed each other's group in between games. I looked at her and noticed her for the first time since RAO had started. I noticed her smile, her figure, the way she moved. I couldn't resist her. After all, my floor was all moved in, my room be organized; I didn't have to worry about classes for another day. I was at ease with my surroundings and myself. And there was Gret; happy, acting silly with her residents, and showing me that she too was at ease. After both of our groups were finished with one particular game, I stole a minute to walk up next to her. "Hey, you how are you doing? You look like you're having fun." There was a quiet moment of sadness in her face. "I really miss you sweetie, when can I see you?" I couldn't see her eyes because of her sunglasses. She stalled for just a second. Anyone could have read her body language at that moment. The world around both of us seemed to slow down. With our residents moving in opposite directions behind us, it gave the appearance from either of our perspectives that we were spinning. The moment could not be stopped or interrupted. I saw the

gloom in Gret's face. The unexpected that I secretly suspected was coming to life. Right there, right then was when I started to fall. Gret's lip quivered a little.

"Tim, I need to talk to you. I...I'm not feeling so well."

Right then I knew what was to come. I quickly played dumb, so she wouldn't think I knew what she was feeling. But in the end, I could not deny it.

"Gret, hon, are you feeling okay? Are you sick?"

"No, we just need to talk." I knew exactly what she wanted to talk about. I could see the expression on her face. I knew what she was feeling. I knew it all along. Maybe I was anticipating it, even a little. But the harsh truth overcame me, and I nearly fell to the ground. The school year had not yet started, and already it was obliterated of any hopes, dreams, or realities that I might have shared with Gret. Gret, the one I loved, the one I trusted, was going to end our relationship. I was beginning to formulate our lives together, but I shared that with no one, not even my closest friends, not even Gret.

I quietly nodded and we went on to our respective groups. The Penguins were assembling on a knoll north of Lafollette Field where there was adequate shade. I was only going through the motions of talking, conversing, and goofing around with the guys, but I needed to tell someone right away. I couldn't keep this in. There I was on the verge of tears, with no one around me. There was no way I could break down now. What would the guys think of me? I was weak, vulnerable, and I needed someone to lean on. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Elizabeth Gibbs. She was there with a few of her residents. She then came up to me.

"Hey Kasper, what's going on? Glad to see at least one of us has decent representation from StuWest."

“Hey Elizabeth. Look, this is going to be weird, but I need to talk to you,” I was trying to keep my composure.

“Okay, what’s up?”

“Here, follow me.” I led her over behind a fairly wide tree. I tried to make it look like RA stuff, so no one would think otherwise. I knelt down with my back to the tree. Elizabeth was facing me.

“I have to tell somebody, or I will explode.” Tears started to swell. There I was, crying in front of someone I just met a few days before, and it took me over a year to cry in front of Gret.

“Tim, what’s the matter?”

“Gret told me she wants to talk. I know she’s going to end it. She’s going to break up. I saw it coming...and...and I can’t break down in front of these guys. What will they think of me?”

“Oh, Tim....I’m sorry.”

“I don’t know what to do! The year hasn’t even started! I don’t know what’s going on. This is hard, real hard.”

“I know, Tim, I know. I’ve been through a nasty breakup before, and I know, they’re never pretty.”

“I just wish she didn’t do this now. I can’t focus right now. This is terrible, what am I going to do?”

“Okay, okay. Just calm down. You’ll be all right, Tim. She just wants to talk. Maybe you can find out exactly what’s going on with her. You know, maybe she’s just scared because everything’s new to her. She probably just wants some time to think and figure things out.”

Elizabeth put her hand on my shoulder and calmed me down for the time being. I was grateful.

She came out of nowhere and helped me out right then.

“I just need to get myself together. I’ll go talk with her after this thing is over.”

“Okay, just let me know if I can help. I’ll be around.”

“Thank you.”

I felt somewhat better. I was at least able to talk with the guys and joke around with them. No one asked about me talking with Gibbs. Gret later came up and asked me to meet her in her room later. Her tone was low and somber. I just nodded. After the awards were announced for the Cardinal Games, I told the guys to go on back and I would catch up later. I slowly made my way to Gret’s dorm. Shively was just across the street. The only way to enter was the front elevator. I luckily hitched a ride up so I didn’t have to call Gret to come down and get me. The seventh floor, room 210 was the destination. I felt hollow and empty on the ride up, waiting for the let down that would send my emotions spiraling out of control. However, I was anticipating what was about to happen. It was just a matter of handling myself during the conversation, and afterwards. I gently knocked on the door.

“Come in!” Gret’s voice was shaky, at best. She was on the phone with someone. I slowly walked in and sat in the chair next to her bed. I calmly looked around, knowing this was most likely the last time I would see her room. Gret kept talking. “Yeah, I know...I am just afraid that things will get worse....okay...well, he just came in. I better go.” She was sobbing as she talked.

“Hi there,” obviously, I was at a loss for words.

“Hi....” Gret didn’t want to say what she was going to say. Granted, it had to be done.

— “So, why don’t I make this easier for you hon? I know what’s going through your head right now. I know you need your space. And who am I to stop you? I have broken up with you twice, and I have no right to object to you wanting to be apart, even if it’s just a little while.” I was trying to be brave, rational, and be the stronger person. She may have seen through it. “I am willing to give you whatever space you need.”

“Tim, I don’t want to do....this....is so hard.” She could barely talk.

“It doesn’t have to be, I understand. I know exactly how I feel.” I was acting stronger than I should have. It truly hurt me to see her like that, so if I could lessen the blow, maybe she would stop crying.

“I just...don’t want things to be weird between us. I don’t want you to hate me.”

“I don’t hate you Gret, for God’s sake I love...I just don’t want to see you upset.”

— “That was my sister I was talking to, I just needed someone else to talk to about this. I feel awful. I feel like...”

“Gret, you don’t have to explain, I had this coming. I’ve broken up with you twice. I deserve this.”

“No Tim, you don’t...” She began to cry again.

“Gret, it’s all right. I’ll admit I was shocked today. But I’ve already done my crying. Elizabeth Gibbs was there for me to help me get over that initial hump. It’s already sunk in. I’ll be okay. So don’t worry.” Again, I was reaching to say things that would ease her mind and heart. I can’t believe I took that route. It was the right thing to do at that moment. I reached out to hold her trembling hand. “It’s all right, Gret.”

— We continued on with very awkward and unusual small talk about classes and books. I got up to leave and told her if she needed anything to give me a call. She quietly embraced me.

Her embrace was only partially comforting in that I felt that she had finally calmed down and was at ease with everything. I on the other hand was drained, emotionally. I was still not over the shock of everything that had just happened in the last three hours. I quietly left and walked back to StuWest.

On the way back I ran into Hawse who was riding his bike on the way to football practice.

“Hey, what do you say there, Timmy?”

“Hey, not much Hawse.” I could tell that Hawse sensed something was wrong.

“Everything okay? You looked like you just seen a ghost.”

“No, I’m all right. Gret and I aren’t seeing eye-to-eye right now.”

“Oh. You want to talk about it?”

“Not right now, but maybe later. I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah, I got to get to practice. Hey take it easy man! Later!” And off he went. He knew something was up. I slowly walked back to StuWest, hoping that in a few days Gret would come to her senses. I did not want the year to start this way.

Chapter 4: Impact

"I am certainly not one of those who need to be prodded. In fact, if anything, I am the prod."

-Sir Winston Churchill

I wasn't quite sure how to feel. Should I not worry about it with the confidence that Gret would soon return? Should I worry about it and try everything to get her back? What about everything else in my life? I had quite a semester in front of me academically, not to mention of floor of 43 young men who needed a constant resource during these first few weeks. I was dazed for the first few hours after I got back to my room. There weren't many guys on the floor. The lifelessness on Three East corresponded conveniently with the lifelessness of my heart that day.

The rituals of the rest of that day were meaningless. I reintroduced myself to some more of the guys on the floor. I don't think that anyone noticed my hollow self. Any sign of hurt or pain was quickly overshadowed with a quick joke or query about hometowns. Elizabeth checked on me that evening. I told her that the initial shock had worn off. She warmly reminded me to come by and visit if I needed anything. Other than Elizabeth, I hadn't told anyone. I figured most of my friends close to Gret would find out through her, like Katrina. I didn't want to tell Hawse right away because I knew his support and understanding would actually be too much for me at that point. I had my pride and my own courage to support me for the time being.

The next day, Sunday, would be the day before the first day of classes for the 1998-1999 academic year. All RA's across campus were required to have their first, official floor meeting that night. We were to cover everything in these meetings: rules, community contracts, floor mascots, intramural teams, and the like. I had been preparing for this meeting since the first day of RAO. Experience told me that this was where it all started. Hawse had reminded me of it, too. This initial meeting set the pace and tone for the entire year. I was a little nervous, but what

— had happened to me the day before had given me something that no other RA at Ball State had: nothing to lose. My heart was broken in the purest sense, and that caused a part of me to not care what a floor full of strangers thought of me. I was going to sell them on the idea and culture of the Penguins, or kill my authority trying. This meeting truly would be interesting due to the fact that we were to fill forty-four individuals into a study lounge that was approximately the size of two dorm rooms put together.

At about 10:30 p.m. that night the Penguins trickled into the study lounge. This would be the largest mandatory meeting of the year. I had to make the most of it. I had everyone there in the room, some sitting on the floor, some on the desks, some leaning against the wall. I took a deep breath, glanced at the returnees, and began my speech.

— “All right guys, how’s everyone doing?” I studied the room for a few nods and grins and then proceeded. “I’m sure everyone is pretty tired and has been fed enough information during the last two days to fill a library. But hey, classes start tomorrow! Woo-hoo!” Some of the guys moaned and groaned while other chuckled. “I want to tell you guys something tonight. I want to tell you about this floor that you live on. Now you’ve all received my letter this summer, you’ve all seen the mural on the wall, and you’ve all probably formulated some opinions about what this floor is about. Well, I want to tell you exactly how it is. You are living on a floor with a mascot that has lasted over two years. The Penguin serves as our mascot and trademark. Whether you are a football player, a basketball player, in a band, play intramurals, or whether you’re part of one of the 300 organizations that Ball State has, you are part of the Penguins. Believe it or not, the name carries a lot of weight around Studebaker residents and across campus. I guarantee that each of you will see at least one other guy on campus over the next few weeks with a Penguin shirt on. The young men who’ve lived on this floor the past couple years know what this floor

—

means and knows about the pride that goes with it. And like it or not, you've been given the responsibility to carry on the tradition, especially since this is the last year that Studebaker will be up and running."

I stopped to take a breath. I looked around the room. All eyes were on me. I had their attention and I wasn't about to lose it. I went on about all the things that the Penguin floor offered: the comradely, the sense of belonging, the sense of welcome, the feeling of home that many guys got even though they were away from home. I even had the five returnees stand up and introduce themselves. I credited them for being here and I emphasized how they were the leaders of the floor as well. Each of the returnees was just as good a resource as I was, especially when I wasn't around. I don't think they were expecting me to point them out as much as I did, but they accepted it with prideful grins. Jimbo, Mike, Jerry, Cory, and Jared.

I went on to talk about other famous Penguins who had lived on the floor. These were individuals such as the starting quarterback of the Ball State football team, a starting lineman, and a couple of defensive players. Most of the hall council leaders had traditionally come from the Penguin floor. As I was talking, I saw their eyes get bigger and brighter. I didn't even realize how enthusiastic I must have seemed. They loved what they were hearing. I was crediting them for being there, and that made them feel important, welcome, and part of the family. It was a feeling that filled my aching heart. And it was all I had. I left them hanging with the mystery of our Toga Party that would soon be upon us. I also hinted about an unusually loud and large individual named Hawse who was rumored to have started the tradition of the Penguins.

"Well there you have it guys. This is your new home for the next seven or eight months. Any questions?" No one had anything to say. Their expressions were as good as gold. They

wanted to get the year started. “Now, in the past, we end our meetings by bringing it in. We all bring our hands in the center and do our floor chant. Now this chant came from the Penguin who sparked the idea: the Bud-Ice Penguin. You guys remember?” There were encouraging grunts of affirmation from the group. “Okay, let’s bring it in....on three.” Everyone rose to their feet and congregated around me. The energy was pumping through everyone’s veins. You could see it in their eyes. “One....Two....Three.....*DOOOBY-DOOOBY-DOOO!!!*”

It was silly, it was brash, but it was our floor, our saying, and our year.

Chapter 5: Reaching Out

"God saw a tear, and wiped it away with a smile from a friend."

- Author Unknown

It was a boost for me morally. I needed that meeting, and I believe all of the new guys did as well. My excitement took me downstairs as I remembered I needed to move my car the appropriate parking lot to avoid the dreaded towing which befalls unwary students. Right outside of the Whitcraft entry I ran into Bryce Cain, one of the assistant hall directors. I told him about the success I had with my first meeting. He responded with anticipated joy that I grew accustomed to in the time I worked with hall directors. After some small talk, Bryce flicked out his cigarette and went back inside.

The night air invigorated me with energy, but then realizing the blackness of the night, I was reminded of the loneliness that accompanies heartache. I quietly moved my car from the adjacent street to the parking strip between Studebaker West and the Noyer Complex.

The following day classes began. Mondays of this semester were to be the most grueling in the history of my academic career. I had five one-hour classes back-to-back beginning at 8 am and one night class that ran from 6:30 p.m. till 9:30 p.m. A grand total of eight hours of classes constituted my Mondays. I went through the motions of a typical first-day-of-classes. I tried to show some enthusiasm in each class, but everything seemed the same. Walking in between classes, I found myself staring at the buildings, the sidewalks, the students, and my feet. I realized that the Ball State campus life was still going to go on even though my world seemed to stop. I tried not to think about Gret or the gash in my heart. I knew this semester would be extremely challenging, even beyond academics. I grumbled through the first day. My sleep was untrue that night as I tossed and turned.

Tuesdays and Thursdays would not be taxing unless I substitute taught at the surrounding Muncie Schools. The first week, in its entirety, was hollow. I slowly met each of my residents one by one. I was occasionally inspired by the light in their eyes sparked by their curiosity and excitement of the coming year. After all, they were freshmen. This was their first year away from home, and they needed something to cling to.

That night I received a phone call from Gret. Her voice was mechanical and automated.

“Hi Tim, this is Gret.”

“Oh, hi. How’s it going.” It took all I had, but I suppressed my pain in my heart.

“I was just calling to see how you were doing. Is everything ok?”

“Oh, everything’s okay, I guess. Just trying to get used to things. How about you?

How’s your floor?”

“They’re great. Everyone is really nice and outgoing. I’m looking forward to this year.

How are your classes?”

“They’re all right. My Mondays are going to be killers. I have eight hours of classes.”

“Tim, are you all right? I mean, about us? You know you can still call on me, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I know. I guess it’s just going to be weird for a while.” I was on the verge of breaking down and telling her all that was in my heart. I felt the pain of loss, and I hungered for her, yet I dared not tell her. “I just want you to know that I’m still here for you if you ever need anything.”

“Well, I better get back to my floor. We’re all hanging out in one of my resident’s room. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine Gret. Don’t worry about me. I’ll talk to you later.”

I wanted to tell her more, but once again my pride spoke before me. My mind found a temporary distraction at our first staff meeting later in the evening. We all met on the fourth floor study lounge. It still seemed cramped despite the spacious study lounge. I spoke up only when it came my turn to tell how our first floor meetings went. I seemed to steal the show by bragging about how well mine went. I compared it to a coach prepping his team for a championship game. I tried not let on that I was hurting. After the meeting I went to me room and kept to myself the rest of the night. I only answered the phone to Katrina and spoke with her briefly. Her kind and encouraging words made me feel a little better. But in the end I just needed some time to myself.

The next night Katrina and Ellen Dumary took me out to the movies to cheer me up. Ellen Dumary was another close friend from the Region. El was a genuinely nice person with a magnetic personality. Her sense of humor was similar to mine. She always caught on to my sarcastic comments quicker than anyone. Every time we hung out, we had a good time. We liked to joke around about how we were secretly twins because we thought the same way.

This particular Wednesday night marked the beginning of a tradition that would last the whole year. We decided that all three of us would round up everyone we could on the Penguin floor and go out to catch a movie. We affectionately christened every Wednesday night Penguin Night. But the main purpose of this first “Penguin Night” was simple, to cheer me up. Katrina and El succeeded in doing so by taking me to see the movie *There’s Something About Mary*. It was quite possibly the most hilarious movie I had ever seen. And it couldn’t have come at a better time. Katrina had already seen it, but she laughed like it was the first time. For another brief moment, my pain was lessened.

I finished out the week. I decided to go home the first weekend just as the rest of campus. After all, it was Labor Day weekend. I wanted to go home and get out of the atmosphere that had developed ever since Gret ended our relationship. I did not tell my parents that we had broken up. I didn't want them to say or think anything in regards to Gret. My parents were very conservative and very protective. Anything that brought harm or danger to their children was not tolerated. If I told them that Gret dumped me, they would point out everything that was wrong with her and why I should move on. I wasn't prepared to hear that. I just wanted to get away for a while. Deep inside my soul and deep inside my heart, I was wishing, hoping, and praying that Gret would have a change of heart.

Chapter 6: Confrontation

"We deceive ourselves when we fancy that only weakness needs support. Strength needs it far more."

-Maarone Swetchine

I returned to campus feeling partially refreshed on Labor Day evening. But there was still a slight sickening feeling in my heart. After several attempts to contact Gret through e-mail, I finally received a response. Hearing the busy footsteps and shuffling around from the guys on Three East coming back to their rooms, I quietly shut my door. Gret's e-mail was somewhat lengthy, and I didn't want to be disturbed as I read it. As it came up on my computer screen, I braced myself for the worst.

Dear Tim

I'm sorry it has taken so long for me to respond to you. I know that you must be upset. I didn't want to tell you this Tim, but I found someone. I know this is going to come as a shock to you and I don't mean to hurt you. We are getting very serious. He asks that I not speak to you because his last girlfriend went back to her old boyfriend and it hurt him really bad. I'm sorry that things turned out this way. I hope you find someone who can make you as happy as I am. I know you will be all right because your friends will be there for you.

*Please take care,
Gret*

My emotions swiftly took me from my room and up to the seventh floor lounge. I needed to share my pain and my frustration immediately. But who else did I know was going through what I was going through? Each of my friends would have been loving and supportive at that point, but it would not have affected me. I wanted to talk to someone who could honestly say that they were feeling as I did. That person happened to be a staff member whose boyfriend had broken her heart. Mandy Ambrose was the RA on the seventh floor. She was just a sophomore and she too had started the year with a similar emotional obstacle. Our hall director, Laura, had told me a few days prior that I should speak with Mandy. So it was her who I called after reading that e-mail.

— We talked for a couple of hours. I did feel fortunate to have met someone so soon who could walk with me down a similar path of grief. Mandy was two years younger than I, yet pain was pain, and any other differences we had were simple and meaningless. As we shared our situations, I began to feel more and more vulnerable. I decided not to share as many details with anyone else as I did with her.

The next few days were long indeed. I didn't want to contact Gret, at least not yet. I was dealing with a lot of things-schoolwork, managing the floor, contributing to the RA staff, all the while trying to hide the darkness that filled my heart and my dreams. Katrina would come over to visit once or twice during the week to see how I was doing. Her discomfort from staying in contact with me and with Gret was evident as she stumbled around her words whenever the topic came up.

— “I know this is hard for you Tim. I know...I've been there. But, I've gone out with them and he seems...real nice. At least he's treating her good. Good thing he's not some jerk.”

“You're right, Katrina. I just wish this feeling of hurt would go away. I feel so replaced, so soon.”

“I know Timmy, just hang in there. Things will get better as time goes by.”

The week did finally finish and I survived. But not much went on during the weekend.

Everyone seemed to be busy which gave me time to myself. I dreaded it. Every time I closed my eyes I would see Gret with this faceless guy, holding her hand, sweeping her off her feet.

The darkness in my heart swelled. I wanted to call Gret to hear from her own lips that we through. I wanted to get answers. I wanted to know why I was replaced so quickly, and how her heart could change in what seemed like a split second. I wanted to call her even though Katrina advised otherwise.

—

— So Saturday evening I called her room. I was going to question her and challenge her present state of mind. If she was truly happy, I wanted to hear it from her directly.

“Gret, this is Tim.”

“Oh,” she replied, cold and monotone.

“Okay Gret, I know that you’ve found someone, but I just need to let you know that this is hard for me and...”

“Um, could we talk about this some other time? It’s really not a good time right now.”

“Well...okay, I guess I’ll talk to you later about it.”

— It was as if all emotion and personality had escaped her. The guy in question was right there beside her. I realized that I had put her in an uncomfortable spot. But it was the fact that she had absolutely no intention of speaking to me that really made me uneasy. How had he swayed her so quickly? Why was I hurting so badly? And why couldn’t I let this go, just like my parents would tell me to do if they knew?

I could not sleep. It was about three o’clock in the morning. The only person I knew that would be up was Katrina. I was risking calling her because she had a party that night and Katrina was one to get plastered whenever possible. Our discussion was slightly unfocused.

“Katrina? this is Tim.”

“Timmy! Hey...what’s up? What are doing you up...I mean, how come you’re up?”

“Ah, can’t sleep, my mind keeps wandering.”

“Oh, still thinking about Gret?”

— “Yeah, but look, if you’re too drunk to talk, it’s okay. We’ll talk tomorrow or something.”

— “No! No! It’s all right. I’m okay. You still thinking about Gret?”

I was a little frustrated that she could barely complete a sentence. I did need to talk, and to this day she swears she remembered the conversation.

The following day, Sunday, dragged on as I waited and waited until the right moment to call. I barely opened any of my books to study or get any assignments done. I didn't get many visitors that day, from the floor or my staff. Hawse was busy with football so I wouldn't hear from him until later tonight. No one else called. It was around 6:30 p.m. when I finally called Gret's room.

"Gret. Hi, this is Tim. Do you have time to talk?"

"Um, well, I'm kind of in a hurry."

"Okay Gret, but I need to talk to you. I need to see you face to face to be sure I understand everything. I'm having a hard time believing everything that's happened."

"Tim..."

"I just need to see you face to face in order to put my mind and my heart at rest."

"Tim, I don't know how to tell you this, but we're engaged."

"Gret, I....I....I don't understand. Engaged? How?" I barely uttered the words. I felt myself floating in mid-air.

"Tim, I know this is sudden, but this is just how it turned out. I didn't want to tell you right away because I knew you would be hurt. I know it doesn't make sense, but this is right, this is what I want."

"Gret, I..."

"He was real upset that I talked to you. He is just afraid that I might go back to you. That's why we can't talk. He's been hurt before and he just doesn't want it to happen again." I

— heard her voice quiver as she hastily spoke. I tried to organize my thoughts and feelings as quickly as I could, despite the nuclear bomb that had just exploded.

“Gret, this is too much. I can’t believe all of this is happening. I need to see you one last time. I need to see you face to face and see it in your eyes. I can’t believe that you would end our relationship like this and be so committed to someone else so soon. It’s just too much to believe right now. Please let me see you one last time.”

“No....no, Tim. We can’t.”

“Why not?” I demanded.

“Because, it would hurt him too much.”

— Any thoughts of rationality or logic were light years away from me. As I listened to her defend him I slowly felt my feet touch the floor. I started to feel my body again. I knew what I needed to tell her. I questioned how he could keep her from seeing me just one last time, just one last look in her eyes, just one last glimpse of her heart, so she could say it to me. I needed to hear her say to me that she didn’t love me anymore, that she was happy and content. I would only be able to see this in her eyes.

“All right. All right Gret.” I started to gather myself. “If I can’t see you face to face, I’ll tell you what I wanted to tell you face to face. I wanted to tell you that I am still in love with you. This is not easy for me...I am hurt.” I could feel the hot tears stream down my face. “I’m hurting real bad. I wanted to tell you that I was starting to see us together in the future. I was starting to picture us together forever. I...”

“Okay Tim, okay. I’ll see you.”

“When?”

— “Tomorrow, at Frog Baby.”

“Why? Why can’t we do this in private?”

“He has to see.”

“See what? Doesn’t he trust you?”

“He has to see, Tim. Otherwise he won’t let me to do this.”

“But...fine...tomorrow at Frog Baby. Is seven o’clock okay?”

“That’s fine. I will see you then. Bye.”

I hung up the phone, went back to my room, got the keys to my car, and headed for the stairs at the end of the hall. I was walking very slowly, with my hand on my head. My vision was blurred. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. I saw various Penguins at their doors as I walked by. Some of them were asking if I was all right, but I did not respond. They were merely blurred objects out of the corner of my eye. I made it to the stairs, walked down and around, as the stairwell goes. I made it to my car and drove. I drove to my friend’s apartment. That friend happened to be Ellen Dumary.

I knocked on the door, tears swelling in my eyes. Deana, Ellen’s roommate, opened the door. I quickly asked for Ellen. She was in the back of the living room along with former residents of StuWest. Everyone could tell I was distressed and responded with blank, uncomfortable stares. I pulled El aside and told her that something terrible had happened. We went back into her room to talk. I told her what had happened. In her astonishment, she quickly called Katrina. Katrina soon came over and helped in my consolation. It was as if someone had died. I felt like I had, at least a little. Katrina and Al did everything in their power to comfort and reassure me. I spoke with troubled, wobbled words.

I felt like I was floating, and none of this was really happening to me. I felt this on the way back to Whitcraft Hall. I decided to lean on my best friend. I called up Hawse and told him

— I was going to spend the night. He seemed to know exactly what I was thinking without saying a word.

Stacy, Hawse's former girlfriend and current friend, was with us. I explained everything that was going on. They both lent tentative and sympathetic ears.

"I know this is crazy, Hawse. I know I really don't have to do this, but I have to see her one more time to get over this and say good-bye. It's about being a man."

"Timmy, I know dude. It sucks. But you know, this is what you have to do. It's like you just said, it's about being a man and it's about doing the right thing."

"Tim, just let us know whatever you need, we'll be there." Stacy was sincere. I had been there for both of them at various times in their tumultuous relationship. It was now their turn to be there for me.

— I stayed with Hawse that night. Roommate and former Penguin Aaron Keppert came in later. I stayed on the top bunk, Aaron slept on the bottom, and Hawse slept on one of his red, dilapidated couches. I slept better than I had in weeks.

Chapter 7: Empty Eyes

"If you love somebody, let them go. If they return, they were always yours. If they don't, they never were."

-Author Unknown

The next day was one of the longest days in the history of my life. It was Tuesday, the day after Labor Day. I did not have any classes on Tuesdays or Thursdays. I just worked my job-required desk hours. Kearstin, our lovable administrative assistant, came by while I was working. She was astonished at how I looked. She even took my temperature, which was right at a hundred degrees. I was somewhere between confidence and fear. I did not eat at all that day. I did none of my homework and avoided talking to anyone, which is nearly impossible as an RA.

After my desk shift, I called Hawse and left a message on his machine. I told him to wait in hiding at Frog Baby. I knew that I would need him after it was all said and done. Besides, the character of Gret's new fiancée was not adding up. I had no idea if he would come crashing out of the bushes at me should I make any kind of move towards Gret.

At 6:30 p.m. I went to the rendezvous point. As I walked I thought to myself how no one has any idea of the torment or anguish I was presently going through and the fear that I was about to face. I was going to make our break up final. I needed closure to a relationship that spanned over a year. I needed to be crushed and defeated, because I knew that was the only way I would be able to move on with my life.

I approached the quaint little fountain outside of Bracken Library which Ball-Staters affectionately called Frog Baby. It was appropriately named because of the six little statue frogs that spit out water from the sides of the pool. There was a small statue of a toddler in the middle dangling two smaller frogs in each hand. Sidewalks pulsed from each direction as if this landmark was the heart of our small Midwest campus. I sat down looking up at the sky as it

— faded to dusk. 6:55 p.m. was what my watch told me. We had agreed on seven o'clock but I was anticipating some delay. I prayed that no one I knew would approach me. I did not want to talk to anyone except Gret. Luckily, no one did except for a few polite nods to acquaintances from class. I looked at my watch again, 7:17 p.m.

After a quick look around to see if I could find Hawse, I noticed two people walking from the north sidewalk next to McKinnley Avenue. I had to look twice. It was Gret. She was walking with who would appear to be the fiancée. It was hard to make out faces because of the darkening sky and both of their heads were down. I assumed that this fellow would hide behind a nearby tree or bush, as he would greedily watch our relationship crumble. But he was actually walking with her and continued to stay near as Gret approached. He actually sat down approximately fifteen feet from where I was sitting and faced the northwest, away from me but well within earshot of us. Gret then stood before me with hands full of t-shirts, books, and other belongings I had given to her as gifts. I slowly took off my sunglasses. She tried not to make eye contact.

“Is there anything else?”

— I barely replied, “A...a...yeah, I do want to talk to you.” She sat down next to me on my left side, quietly. She handed me the belongings she had in her hands. I set them on my right side. As I looked into her eyes, I saw a hollowness that I’ve never seen in anyone’s eyes. She was zombie-like and uninspired. I never saw her so uncomfortable and worried.

— “I wanted to tell you, one last time, that I couldn’t believe all of this is happening. I mean, it’s all happening so fast. I haven’t had time to catch my breath. I’m hurt, Gret. I didn’t want this to happen.” A simple nod was all I received. “I wanted to tell you that I still love you. I wanted to tell you that I was getting to the point of no return. I was starting to realize that you

were the one I wanted to be with the rest of my life. I was beginning to realize that I wanted to marry you. I'm just sorry I was too late." She looked down as I spoke. Her lips were tightly sealed. "Gret, I can't believe that you found the one you want to marry so soon. I don't understand. Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"Do your parents know?"

"Yes, they're happy for T.J. and me and they understand."

"Gret, how long have you felt this way about me? How long have you felt that our relationship wasn't going where it should?"

"Since about last spring, Tim."

I had not see that coming. "Okay, but I don't understand how this guy wouldn't let you come here tonight, at least alone. Doesn't he trust you? If you guys are engaged, why would he not trust you..."

"Tim, don't." She shook her head. I saw that if I proceeded with the accusations that she would leave, so I stopped.

"All right, all right, Gret. Have you told anyone else?"

"We decided not to tell everyone yet."

"I don't know about you, but if I found the person I was going to marry, I would want to yell it from the rooftops."

There was no reply.

"All right then, Gret. I suppose he wouldn't like it if I went over there and shook his hand and told him how lucky he is to be you."

She shook her head.